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Friday, April 2, 2004

Agency approves \$213 billion 25-year transportation plan

FROM WIRE AND STAFF REPORTS

SAN BERNARDINO — A regional agency on Thursday approved a \$213 billion transportation plan designed to curb gridlock on freeways and improve airports and train stations that serve more than 17 million people in six counties.

The Southern California Association of Governments' Regional Council approved the plan, called "Destination 2030," which is designed to help the region accommodate rapid growth while trying to make the most of limited funding.

"If we don't start making serious investments in our infrastructure now, the Southern California we leave to our children will suffer," said Temecula Councilman and SCAG First Vice President Ron Roberts.

The report will be forwarded to several federal agencies, including the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration, for approval by June 8 so that the region can maintain its conformity to federal air-quality standards and qualify projects included in the plan for state and federal funding. The plan would then be certified and reviewed by SCAG every three years, said the board's Executive Director Mark Pisano.

The plan provides a blueprint for the region's transportation needs over the next 25 years.

Some of the investments and recommendations listed in the report for projects in San Bernardino, Riverside, Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties are:

- connecting car pool lanes to fill gaps in its network;
- improving regional airports;
- increasing the capacity of Metrolink, a regional rail system; and
- investing in a \$29 billion high-speed rail system that uses magnetic levitation technology and would connect Southern California's largest cities.

Planning officials admit that improving transportation while California is mired in a fiscal deficit could be difficult.

But the report suggests the funding shortfall could be alleviated by extending some county sales taxes that are expected to be phased out; adjusting the state gasoline tax after 2010; and passing a Los Angeles County half-cent sales tax that would be used for its Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Pisano noted that many transportation proposals, such as car pool lanes and Metrolink, have come to fruition as a result of the previous 25-year plan.

"The unfortunate thing is it takes a long time to develop these projects, but

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they are needed," he said.

The agency's 75-member regional council is comprised of representatives from San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles, Orange, Imperial and Ventura counties. Commissioners from San Bernardino County include Apple Valley Councilman Ted Burgnon, Barstow Mayor Lawrence Dale and San Bernardino County Second District Supervisor Paul Biane.

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